THE ISLAMIC MESSAGE

Communication, Response and Trials

By

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Preface

Researchers and scientists, have presented useful concepts in different fields. All such concepts are derived from assumptions, observations, previous knowledge and new research. The theories may be right or wrong. I have adopted a new approach to elaborate significant concepts, as I have basically derived them from the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Based on Divine Guidance, this approach would definitely lead to the right path. Divine Guidance is free from flaws and errors and is helpful for the entire mankind.

The book comprises of 12 articles; they deal with Dawah, Tests and Trials. Some goals have been kept in view, in writing these articles. First, the argument is based on the verses of the Qur'an. Second source is the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The author has sought insight from the sayings (hadiths) of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh). Thirdly, lessons from the life of Umar (ra), the second Caliph of Islam, have guided me. A unique feature of this book is that all the articles are supplemented with diagrams. One expects a better understanding of the concept, through them.

Chapter on 'Dawah' covers its various aspects, such as Prophet Ibrahim's propagation, tidings and warnings, modes of communication, Prophet Muhammad's experience of conveying the message, role of questions and reflections.

Chapter on 'Tests and Trials' is about communication skills, continuous nature of trials,

Prophet Yusuf's Experience, Prophet Ibrahim's Experience and Umar's Criteria of evaluating a person's worth.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "(This is) a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded" (Qur'an 38: 29). Allah makes it clear in the Qur'an that He has revealed the Qur'an so that people might reflect upon it.

The teachings of Islam contain wisdom which one must discover. What is required is research with patience. The present book is a humble attempt to explore new insights. With my limited knowledge and research, I have presented twelve concepts; derived from the frame work of Islam. Obviously, there is a much richer treasury to be explored. Deeper we go into the teachings of Islam, more precious insights we would be able to perceive. Let this book be a source of motivation to the youth to study the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammed (pbuh).

Writing this book has been a great learning experience, as this brought me closer to the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This book has also helped me effectively utilize my time and talent in the way of Allah. I pray to Allah to accept my humble efforts.

Syed Kazim

Acknowledgements

Saying 'Thank You' amounts to more than good etiquette. It indicates a person's spirituality. One who is most deserving of thanks and praise Allah (swt). May He be glorified and exalted. He has bestowed blessings upon His slaves in spiritual and worldly terms. Allah has also instructed us to offer thanks to Him for Divine blessings.

Islam appreciates our offering of thanks to Allah. In addition, it teaches us to thank people for their kindness. Islam invites people to worship and praise Allah and also to thank other human being for their favours. Thanking people is very important in Islam, as Prophet (pbuh) said, "He who does not thank people, does not thank Allah" (Ahmad and Tirmidhi).

So I would like to thank Allah for rightly guiding me, to use His given talent and knowledge in His cause. I also thank Allah for giving me inspiration to absorb new ideas and concepts to write this book.

Also I would like to thank my parents for giving me the best possible education and making me confident to take up new challenges. I would also like to thank my beloved wife, for her continuous support and assistance. She took good care of my two children, which helped me in completing the book with complete focus.

I would also like to thank my teacher and guide, Janab Ameenul Hassan, for his ideas and valuable inputs, which have played a significant role in improving the quality of the book.

I would like to thank my friend, Mr. Abid. Inspite of his busy schedule, he spared time to design all the diagrams, in a very competent manner and on time. I would also like to thank my friend, Mr. Syed Mohammed, for proof reading the entire book.

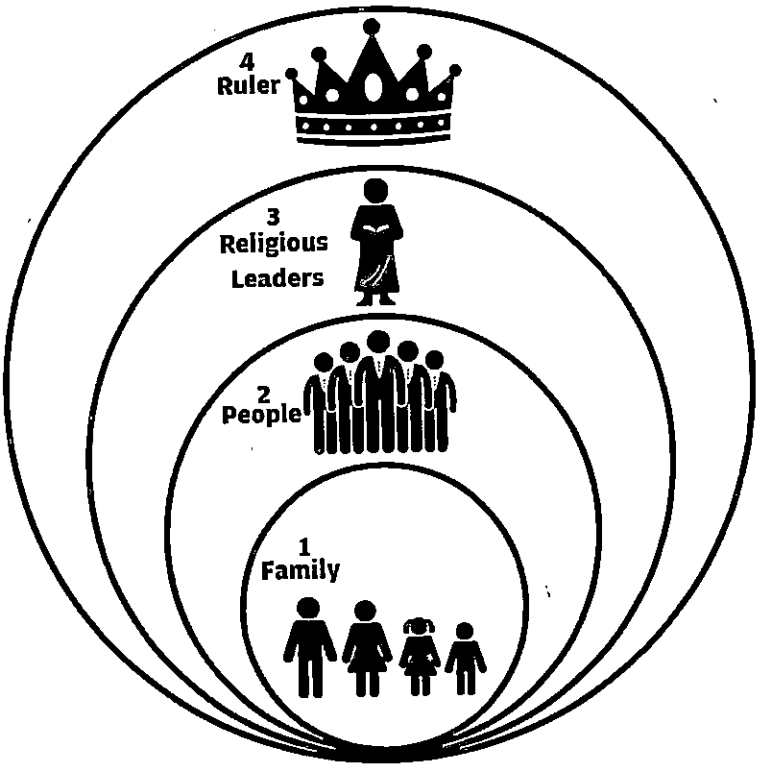
There are many people who have directly and indirectly contributed to my personal growth, which has helped me to emerge as writer. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all.

Syed Kazim

I

Dawah

Prophet Ibrahim's Propagation of Islam



Introduction

Introducing truth and calling people to accept it is the religious, moral and social responsibility of every Muslim, who knows the truth and has already accepted it. Every Muslim is a member of humanity. So every human being deserves his love, sympathy and compassion. Muslim is a sincere well-wisher of all, irrespective of economic status, gender, race, colour, language or nationality. Hence, he will share with them, his knowledge of the right path, that leads to

eternal happiness. He would warn them of the possibility of eternal punishment. Thus, propagation of the message of Islam is a fundamental and important task of every Muslim.

When we analyse the life of Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh), his Dawah struggle is very organised. He addressed his family, society, religious scholars and the king. At the family stage, he invited his father Azar to Islam. Then he invited the common people to truth. He cited various examples referring to stars, moon and the sun. He turned his attention to the religious scholars. He initiated dialogue with them and suggested that they ask the big idol, if he had indeed chopped off the heads of all the other minor idols. Ibrahim addressed the king Namrud. He asked the king whether he could make the sun rise from the west.

The propagation methodology adopted by Prophet Ibrahim may be understood from his efforts. A Muslim may learn and understand the need to propagate the message at different levels.

Levels of addressees

The following are the various levels at which Ibrahim addressed people.

1. Family

God says in the Qur'an, "(Mention) when Ibrahim said to his father, "O my father, why do you worship that which does not hear and does not see and will not benefit you at all?"" (Qur'an 19:42). "When he said to his father and his people, "What do you worship?" They said, "We worship idols and remain to them devoted." He said, "Do they hear you when you supplicate? Or do they benefit you, or do they harm?"" (Qur'an 26:70-73).

This is a conversation of Ibrahim (pbuh) which is recorded in the Qur'an. His father became furious. It is well known, that Ibrahim's father not only worshipped idols but sculpted and sold them as well. Ibrahim (pbuh) felt that it was his duty as a good son to advise his father against this evil, so that he could be saved from Allah's punishment. Being a wise son, he did not ridicule his father. He told him of his affection. Then he gently asked him why he worshipped lifeless idols, who were neither able to hear nor see. How could such gods benefit or harm him?

2. People

About Ibrahim, God says in the Qur'an, "So when the night covered him (with darkness), he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that disappear." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah. Indeed, I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining towards the truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allah." (Qur'an 6:76-79). God also says in the Qur'an, "And of His signs are the night and day and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah, who created them, if it should be Him that you worship" (Qur'an 41:37).

In the first set of verses, Ibrahim clarified to his people that these celestial bodies are not deities and cannot be worshipped as partners with Allah. Indeed,

these bodies are created things, fashioned, controlled and managed by Allah and made to serve human beings. They appear sometimes and disappear at others, going out of sight from our world. However, Allah always rules over everything, and nothing can be hidden from Him. He is without end, everlasting and there is no other deity but Allah.

In the next set of verses, we learn that Ibrahim made clear to them, that the celestial bodies are unworthy of worship. Indeed they are among the signs of Allah. The reasoning of Ibrahim helped to reveal the truth. Then a conflict between him and his people began, who were worshippers of stars and planets.

3. Religious Leaders

When everyone went to the other side of the river for a grand celebration, Ibrahim went to the temple with a sharp axe. He then raised his axe and started smashing the idols (worshipped by the people). He destroyed them all except one, on whose neck he hung the axe. He left the temple. He wanted to show his people a practical proof of their foolishness in worshipping deities other than Allah.

When the priests returned to the temple from the celebration, they were shocked to see their gods smashed to pieces, lying scattered all over the temple. They began to speculate and Ibrahim's name came to their minds. Then the priests called him and asked him if he was responsible for breaking the idols. To which Ibrahim responded by saying, "... Rather, this, the largest of them, did it, so ask them if they should (be able to) speak" (Qur'an 21:63).

This conversation of Ibrahim is recorded in the Qur'an. Ibrahim adopted a unique approach to convey

the message of truth. Priests could see that the biggest idol was not broken. Ibrahim told them that the big idol might be the culprit. They replied that Ibrahim himself knew well that the idols could not speak or move. They realized the senselessness of their beliefs; however, their arrogance would not allow them to admit their foolishness.

This gave Ibrahim a chance to present the message of truth. He pointed out the foolishness of worshipping these lifeless objects. Ibrahim said, "... Do you worship that which you (yourself) carve, While Allah created you and that which you do" (Qur'an 37:95-96). These verses show that Ibrahim used a unique argument to remind the priests. How could they sensibly worship the idols while they had carved the idols themselves!

4. Ruler

God says in the Qur'an, "Have you not considered the one who argued with Ibrahim about his Lord (merely) because God had given him kingship? When Ibrahim said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Ibrahim said, "Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So, the disbeliever was overwhelmed (by astonishment), and God does not guide the wrongdoing people" (Qur'an 2:258).

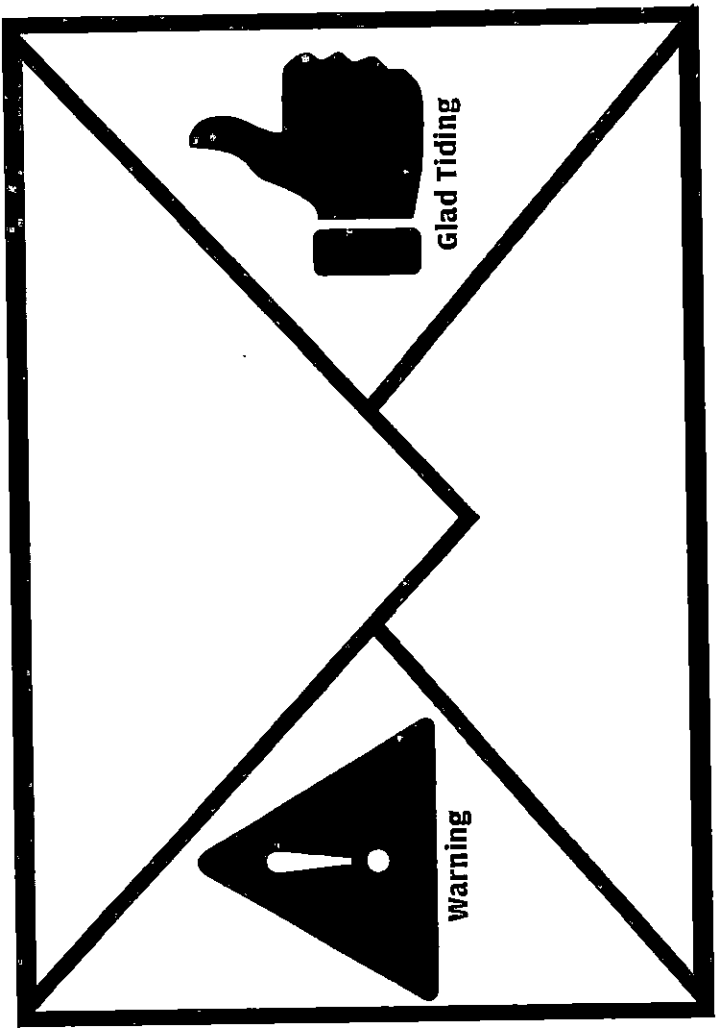
Prophet Ibrahim talked to the king of Iraq (called Namrud), who also called himself God. After Ibrahim came out of the fire unharmed, a large segment of the society started paying serious attention to the message of the prophet of God. At this, the king felt that his throne was in danger, and that he might lose power. Seeing this situation, Namrud wanted to engage in debate with Ibrahim, to show his people that Namrud himself had divine attributes and Ibrahim was wrong.

Namrud asked Ibrahim about God. Ibrahim replied, "My Lord is He who gives life and death". Namrud then claimed, "I give life and death". He ordered an innocent person to be killed by the royal executioner. Then he freed a prisoner who was on death row. He turned his attention to Ibrahim and said, "I can also give life and death". Ibrahim said, "My Lord makes the sun rise from the East. Can you make it rise from the West?" Hearing this, Nimrud was confounded. He was beaten by this argument. He was speechless in front of his own people. Prophet Ibrahim left him and continued his mission of inviting people to truth.

Conclusion

Islam is guidance for people. It is the way of life presented by the Creator of this universe, for the salvation of the entire mankind. The message of all prophets (including the final message of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)) was universal. The Islamic community also has a universal character. Therefore naturally, the responsibility of the Muslim community is to propagate the truth. All individuals and every human group, (including even the professed enemies of Islam) should be given the knowledge of truth. It is the basic right of every human being, that he be shown the right path. Truth would lead him to heaven and save him from the trauma of hell fire. Thus, every individual, group, organisation and movement should appreciate the message of Islam. Muslims should take it to people around them, including religious leaders and rulers.

Tidings and Warnings



Introduction

Inviting people to Islam is one of the cardinal duties of believers. When one is inviting people to

Islam, it is necessary to adopt the right strategy and focus on the right content. When we read the Qur'an and closely observe the life of Prophet (pbuh) we learn the methodology of inviting people. It may be employed effectively to convey the message and create an impact on society.

A number of verses in the Qur'an speak about the role of Prophets. Allah says in the Qur'an, "Indeed, We have sent you, (O Muhammad), with the truth as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner, and you will not be asked about the companions of Hellfire" (Qur'an 2:119). "O People of the Scripture! there has come to you Our Messenger to make clear to you (the religion) after a period (of suspension) of messengers, lest you say, "There came not to us any bringer of glad tidings or a warner." But there has come to you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner. And Allah is over all things competent". (Qur'an 5:19)

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And with the truth We have sent the Qur'an down, and with the truth it has descended. And We have not sent you, (O Muhammad), except as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner" (Qur'an 17:105). "O Prophet, indeed We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of glad tidings and a warner" (Qur'an 33:45). "And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner. But most of the people do not know" (Qur'an 34:28). "Indeed, We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of glad tidings and a warner" (Qur'an 48:8).

These verses explain that the Prophet (pbuh) was a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. The Prophet warned people against the punishment to be experienced in Hell. He told them of the desirable

future (in paradise) that awaited the pious. They would be rewarded with infinite life of the Paradise in the hereafter. Thus, glad tidings and warnings were an integral part of the prophetic message.

1. Glad Tidings

The Qur'an addresses people to motivate them and inspire them to do good acts. One may refer to the Qur'anic verses about glad tiding of Paradise: 2:25, 3:15-17, 3:133, 4:57, 9:72, 13:35, 15:45-48, 18:31, 19:61-63, 22:23-24, 35:33-35, 36:55-58, 37:41-49, 43:71-73, 44:51-55, 47:15, 55:46-77, 56:15-26, 56:28-38, 57:21, 69:22-23, 76:12-22, 78:31-36, 83:25-28 and 88:10-16. The Qur'an talks about the inhabitants of Paradise: 2:82, 3:198, 4:13, 4:57, 4:124, 5:85, 5:119, 9:20-22, 9:72, 9:88-89, 9:100, 13:22-23, 14:23, 15:45-47, 18:107-108, 19:60, 22:14, 22:23-24, 44:51, 48:17, 52:17, 54:54-55, 55:46, 56:10-12, 68:34, 70:23-35, 77:41-44, 79:40-41, 83:22-24, 85:11, 89:27-30, 99:7-8 and 101:6-7.

A number of individuals listened to the prophet. They embraced Islam and were ready to sacrifice all worldly pleasures, if need be, to attain everlasting success.

2. Warnings

Along with tidings, the Qur'an also warned the evil doers. Allah has spoken about this aspect of hereafter in 2:200-202, 3:14, 3:77, 3:85, 3:145, 3:176, 3:198, 4:77, 4:134, 6:32, 7:147, 7:169, 9:38, 10:62-64, 11:15-16, 12:57, 12:109, 13:26, 13:34, 14:27, 16:22, 16:41, 16:96-97, 16:107-109, 17:18-19, 17:21, 17:72, 20:127, 22:11, 27:4-5, 28:60, 28:70, 28:83-84, 29:64,

34:1, 39:26, 40:39-40, 41:16, 41:31, 42:20, 42:22, 43:35, 57:20, 68:33, 73:20, 87:17 and 93:4.

An effective way of warning people is to inform them about Hell. The Qur'an sheds light on the terrible conditions of hell. Allah has described them in 2:24, 4:56, 7:41, 10:27, 11:106-107, 14:16-17, 14:49-50, 15:43-44, 17:97, 18:29, 22:19-22, 23:104, 25:12-13, 33:66, 38:56-58, 39:16, 39:72, 40:70-72, 50:30, 56:42-44, 56:51-56, 66:6, 67:6-8, 69:31-32, 70:15-18, 74:26-29, 76:4, 77:30-33, 78:21-22 and 104:5-9. The Qur'an also identifies the inhabitants of hell in 2:39, 2:86, 2:161-162, 4:10, 4:93, 4:140, 4:145, 5:10, 5:72, 7:18, 7:36, 7:38-39, 9:63, 9:68, 11:119, 17:18, 19:72, 20:74, 21:29, 21:98-99, 22:51, 26:94-95, 33:64-65, 38:55-56, 38:59-64, 40:6, 40:46-48, 43:74-76, 50:24-26, 54:47-48, 56:41-42, 72:15, 72:23, 79:37-39, 85:10, 98:6, 101:8-11 and 111:1-5. All these verses should suffice to warn people.

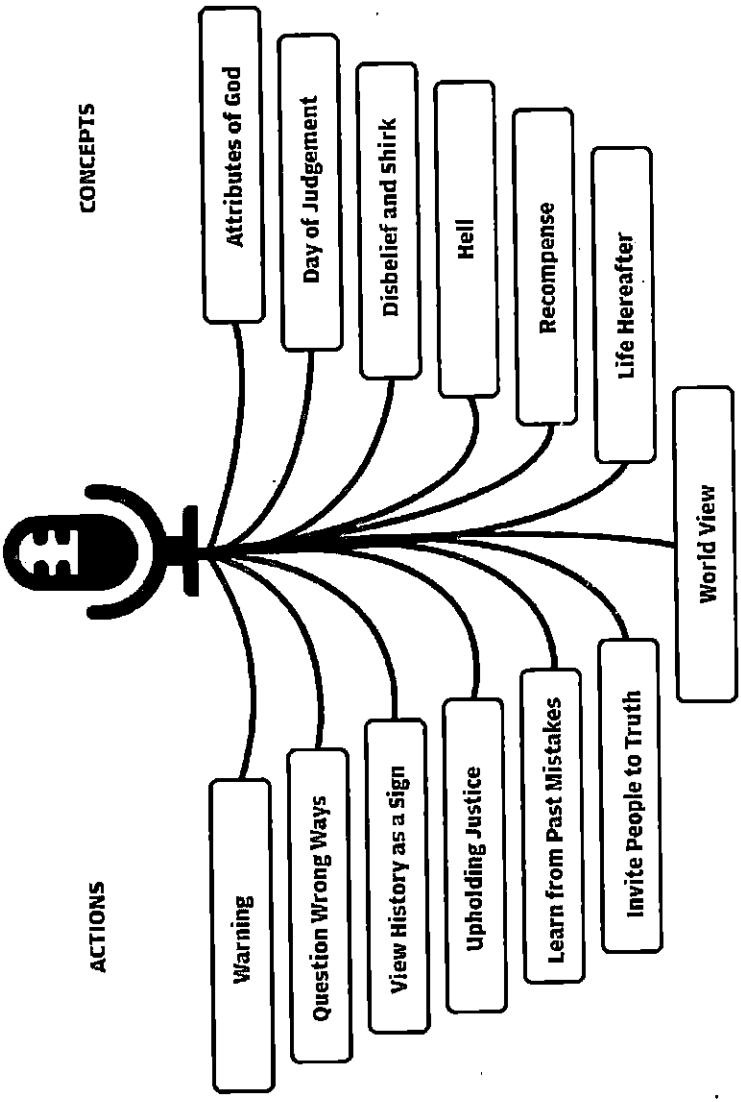
Here an event from the life of the Prophet may be mentioned. Once a Meccan chief Utbah came to speak to the Prophet, on behalf of the tribe of Quraish. He gave various offers to the Prophet and asked him to stop his propagation of Islam. The Prophet replied to his offers by reciting from the Qur'an, the verses of Surah Fussilat. When the Prophet recited verse number 13, Uthah said, "For God's sake, have mercy on your people". In verse 13, Allah says, "But if they turn away, then say, "I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt (that struck) Aad and Thamud" (Qur'an 41:13).Listening to this, Uthba started thinking about the trauma they will have to face, and requested the Prophet to stop reciting and then left. The Surah describes the glory of Qur'an which should be appreciated; then addresses unbelievers to ponder over

it. They are informed about the punishment that awaits them, as a result of denial of truth. The verse 13 specifically states that if the polytheists refuse to accept the message, then Divine punishment is imminent.

Conclusion

All people are not same. People are motivated to accept the truth in many possible ways. Some are motivated by reward and some by the possibility of punishment. An individual performs good deeds and abstains from wrong to attain Paradise. Another may adopt good conduct, to avoid the punishment of Hell. Islam adopts both methods to motivate people. When inviting to Islam and communicating about it, one needs to present both aspect of reward and punishment.

Belief and Communication



Introduction

Primary tool of communication is public speaking, i.e., the act of giving a speech before an audience. Public speaking is an art. It serves to communicate the message, in the context of space and time. For public speech to be effective, one needs to focus on what is spoken and how it is spoken. The Qur'an mentions a true believer who gave a speech in the court of Firon. He protested against the inhuman decision of Firon to kill Prophet Musa (pbuh). A number of insights may be derived from the speech. Thus, we learn about the content of an effective public speech. The speech of the believer is described below.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And a believing man from the family of Firon who concealed his faith said, "Do you kill a man (merely) because he says, 'My Lord is Allah' while he has brought you clear proofs from your Lord? And if he should be lying, then upon him is (the consequence of) his lie; but if he should be truthful, there will strike you some of what he promises you. Indeed, Allah does not guide one who is a transgressor and a liar. O my people, sovereignty is yours today, (you being) dominant in the land. But who would protect us from the punishment of Allah if it came to us?" Firon said, "I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct". And he who believed said, "O my people, indeed I fear for you. I apprehend a fate like that of the people of Nuh and of Aad and Thamud and those after them. And Allah wants no injustice for (His) servants. And O my people, indeed I fear for you the Day of Calling. The Day you will turn your backs fleeing; there is not for you from Allah, any protector. And whoever Allah leaves astray – there is not for him

any guide. And Yusuf had already come to you before, with clear proofs, but you remained in doubt of that which he brought to you, until when he died, you said, 'Never will Allah send a messenger after him'. Thus, does Allah leave astray he, who is a transgressor and skeptic". Those who dispute concerning the signs of Allah without an authority having come to them – great is hatred (of them) in the sight of Allah and in the sight of those who have believed. Thus, does Allah seal over every heart (belonging to) an arrogant tyrant. And Firon said, "O Haman, construct for me a tower that I might reach the ways. The ways into the heavens – so that I may look at the deity of Musa; but indeed, I think he is a liar". And thus, was made attractive to Firon the evil of his deed, and he was averted from the (right) way. And the plan of Firon was not, except in ruin. And he who believed said, "O my people, follow me; I will guide you to the way of right conduct. O my people, this worldly life is only (temporary) enjoyment, and indeed, the Hereafter – that is the home of (permanent) settlement. Whoever does an evil deed, will not be recompensed except by the like thereof; but whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – those will enter Paradise, being given provision therein without account. And O my people, how is it that I invite you to salvation, while you invite me to the Fire? You invite me to disbelieve in Allah and associate with Him that, of which I have no knowledge, and I invite you to the Exalted in Might, the Perpetual Forgiver. Assuredly, that to which you invite me cannot give any response to a supplication in this world or in the Hereafter; and indeed, our return is to Allah, and indeed, the transgressors will be companions of the

Fire. And you will remember what I (now) say to you, and I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed, Allah is Seeing of (His) servants'"" (Qur'an 40:28-44).

Content

We learn that the following are the elements of an effective speech:

1. Warning (40:28)

The true believer reminds the listeners about the possibility of punishment which they might encounter. If the warning given by Musa materialized, they will be struck with a grave punishment and Allah would not guide transgressors and liars.

2. Question Wrong Ways (40:29 and 41)

The true believer poses two questions to Firon in his speech. The first, "if the punishment would come from Allah, who would protect you." The second question was to the people, "how is it that I am inviting you to Salvation and you are inviting me to Fire".

3. View History as a Sign (40:31)

The true believer had knowledge about history, so he would refer to incidents of history in his speech. He used the examples of people of Nuh, and of Aad and Thamud; whom Allah had destroyed, due to their disobedience and injustice.

4. Upholding Justice (40:30 and 32-33)

The true believer reminded Firon and the people about the Day of Judgement. He said that he fears for them, as to what would happen to them on the day of

judgement. The true believer went ahead to describe the scenario of the day of judgement. It will be a day when they will turn their backs fleeing and they would not find any protector or guide.

5. Learn from Past Mistakes (40:34)

The true believer then reminded them about the mistakes committed by them. When long back, Allah sent Yusuf with clear proofs, they remained in doubt about him. When he died, they thought that Allah would never send another messenger after him. But now Allah has sent a messenger again and they are treating him in the same manner.

6. Invite People to Truth (40:38 and 42)

The true believer, in his speech, also ensures that he invites people to the truth. He invites them by asking them to follow him, so that he can guide them to the right conduct. Later when they invite him towards disbelief, he in-turn again invites them toward the one true God.

7. World View (40:39)

The true believer also helps the people to understand the reality of this world. He tells them that the world is a temporary place of enjoyment. So, it is necessary for people to understand the world and prepare for the hereafter, that is permanent.

8. Life Hereafter (40:39)

The true believer, after speaking about the world, speaks about the hereafter. The life of the hereafter will be permanent, where the individual will live in paradise or hell on a permanent basis.

9. Recompense (40:40)

The true believer talks about the recompense; which the good and bad, male and female would get on the day of judgement. He states that the person, who does, evil deeds will have an evil ending and the person who has done good deeds, will enter paradise.

10. Hell (40:41 and 43)

The true believer describes the hell, so that people understand. It is fire and transgressors will be the companions of the fire.

11. Disbelief and Shirk (40:42)

The true believer criticizes false belief whereby they disbelieve in Allah, by associating partners with Allah. This is the biggest sin. He warns them of punishment and clarifies the reason for the punishment.

12. Day of Judgement (40:43)

The true believer, in the end of the speech, tells people that one day they have to return to Allah. Today they might ignore the truth or they might disbelieve in God, but in the Hereafter, the entire mankind will have no option but to return to Allah.

13. Attributes of God (40: 42 and 44)

The true believer enlightens his audience about the attributes of Allah. Allah is Exalted in Might, the Perpetual Forgiver and Seeing of His servants.

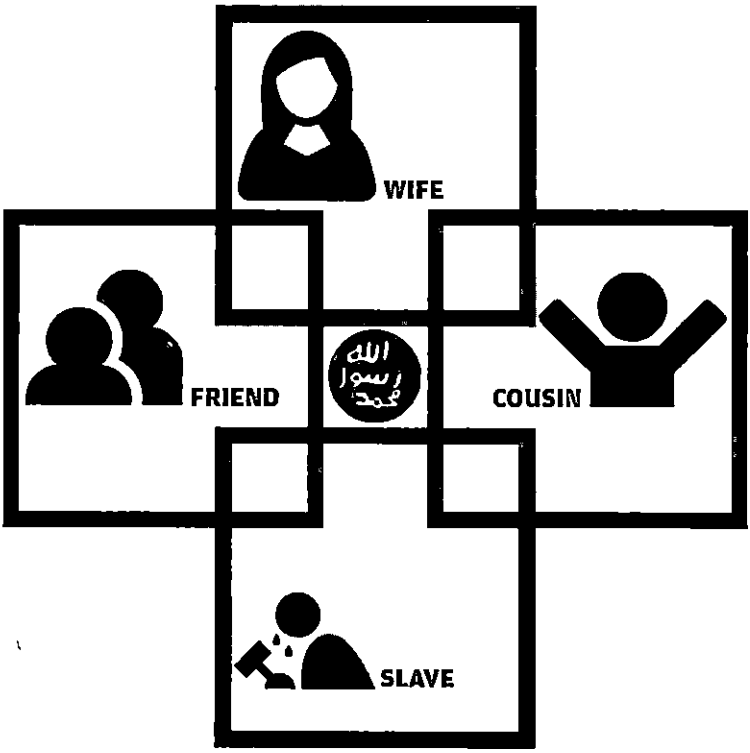
Conclusion

Allah says in the Qur'an, "So Allah protected him from the evils they plotted, and the people of Firon

were enveloped by the worst of punishment" (Qur'an 40:45). After the speech of the true believer, the consequences of the speech are narrated in this verse. The tyrants could not do any harm to him. He had surrendered himself to Allah, who kept him safe from the evils of these wrong doers.

Generally, in presenting the message of truth, dangers seem to beset the path of the missionary. But he should not be deterred by dangers. One must convey the message of truth, putting trust in Allah. Then dangers do not stop him. From these verses, one learns about the content of a public speech. A believer is taught to put trust in Allah. He should pray to Almighty to protect him, from the evils plotted by wrongdoers. The historical lessons is that, Firon and his associates were enveloped by the worst of punishments.

Prophet Muhammad's Experience of Conveying the Message



Introduction

The first set of verses revealed to the Prophet (pbuh) conveyed an instruction from Allah to propagate the teachings of Islam. They were meant to motivate the Prophet (pbuh) into action and to teach him the duties he was being entrusted with. He was to strive inspite of obstacles that stood in the way of his

mission. The first verse is significant in this context. Allah says in the Qur'an, "O you who covers yourself (with a garment), arise and warn, and glorify your Lord. Purify your clothing and avoid uncleanliness. Do not confer favour to acquire more, but for your Lord be patient" (Qur'an 74:1-7). After the above-mentioned revelation, Prophet (pbuh) began by individually inviting others to Islam. The Prophet spoke to a select group of individuals (and did not make any public address). He (pbuh) began with people closest to him, the members of his household and his close friends.

Categories

The following were in his close circle:

1. Wife – Khadija

Khadijah was the first woman, or rather the first person, to believe in the Prophet (pbuh). She was also the first person to hear revealed verses from the Prophet (pbuh), and consequently was the first person, other than the Prophet (pbuh) to recite the Qur'an.

2. Cousin - Ali ibn Abi Talib

Shortly after Khadijah embraced Islam, Ali ibn Abi Talib also entered into the fold of Islam. He was the first child to embrace Islam, being 10 years old at that time (According to At- Tabari and Ibn Ishaq). When the Prophet was young, Abu Talib was experiencing financial difficulties. Wanting to lighten the financial burden on his uncle, the Prophet (pbuh) offered to support one of his children and act as his guardian. The child he took in his care was Ali. So even before the Prophet received revelation for the

first time, Ali was one of the members of his household.

3. Slave – Zayd ibn Harithah

Zayd, known as Hibbun (the beloved one of the Prophet), was the first freed slave to embrace Islam. Having first entered the household of the Prophet as a slave, Zayd was devoted to the Prophet and his love was likewise reciprocated. Zayd, originally a free person from a family of free people, was taken captive as a child during a raid and was subsequently enslaved. Zaid was eventually purchased in Makkah, which is how he ended up in the household of the Prophet (pbuh). The Prophet then freed Zayd and adopted him.

4. Friend – Abu Bakar

Abu Bakar was the first free adult male to embrace Islam. He was one of the closest friends of the Prophet (pbuh). Throughout their long years of friendship, Abu Bakar became very much acquainted with the noble character of the Prophet. It is not surprising that he embraced Islam without any hesitation. The Prophet said, "Every single person I invited to Islam, hesitated, and considered the matter – except for Abu Bakar. When I invited him, he neither wavered nor hesitated (to the contrary, he raced to embrace Islam" (As-Seerah An-Nabawiyyah by Abu Shuhbah). Abu Bakar was not just a free man; he was also a nobleman and was well-respected among the Quraish for many reasons.

Conclusion

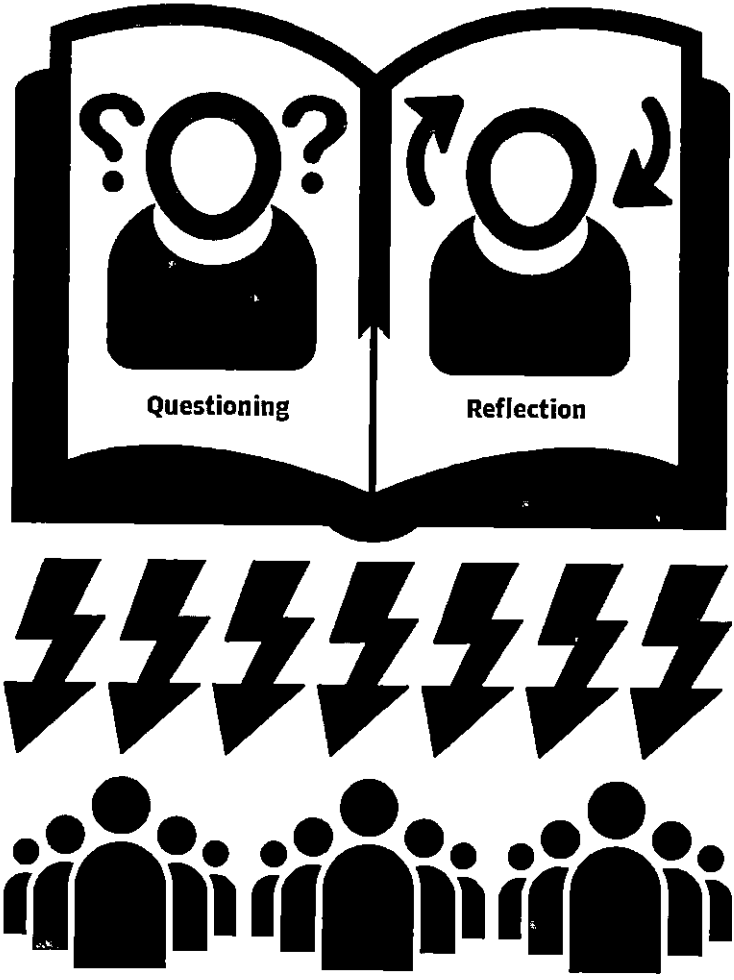
From this we learn that, one should initially convey the message to people closest to one. Prophet

(pbuh) first invited his wife, his cousin and his slave. Then the Prophet also invited his best and closest friend to Islam, who accepted Islam without any kind of hesitation. When the people of first circle accept the message, the number of believers increases. Confidence and support of the first circle helped to take the message forward.

After this phase, the religion gained strong foundation and momentum. Generally, people started coming into the fold of Islam. The resources donated by Khadija, energy of Ali ibn Abi Talib, devotion of Zaid ibn Harithah and the good reputation of Abu Bakar, helped spread Islam. As soon as Abu Bakar accepted Islam, he became active with the passion of a fresh convert. His enthusiasm never died, nor waned. Abu Bakar was well known in society. This gave him a better opportunity to have a positive impact on listeners. Many people entered the fold of Islam through him to the movement.

From this we learn that, one needs to convey the message to the closest circle, and then move ahead. Support of the closest circle, would bring well-wishers to the movement.

Questions and Reflections



Introduction

Questioning and reflection are efficient methods to arrive at the truth. For instance, one may use them to prove the existence of Allah. The Qur'an encourages this mode of thinking. One prominent place where we can witness this is chapter Al-Mulk, which is chapter 67 of the Qur'an. The Qur'an asks questions and invites people to reflect on them. The central theme of the chapter is to warn those who are indifferent to truth.

1. Questions

The chapter raises 11 questions. Verse 3 says, "(And) who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So, return (your) vision (to the sky); do you see any breaks?". This question is about the creation of the universe. Verse 8 says, "It (i.e. the hell) almost bursts with rage. Every time a group (of sinners) is thrown into it, its keepers ask them, "Did there not come to you a warner?". Verse 14 says. "Does He who created not know (about the creation), while He is the Subtle, the Acquainted?".

Verse16 says, "Do you feel secure that He who (holds authority) in the heavens would not cause the earth to swallow you and suddenly it would sway?". This is a question about natural calamities (such as earthquakes). Verse 17 says, "Or do you feel secure that He who (holds authority) in the heavens would not send against you a storm of stones? Then you would know how (severe) was My warning". This is a question about possible destruction which would visit them, due to their disobedience. Verse 19 says, "Do

they not see the birds above them with wings outspread and (sometimes) folded in? None holds them (aloft) except the Most Merciful. Indeed, He is, of all things, Seeing". This question is about flight of birds.

Verse 20 says, "Who could be an army for you to aid you other than the Most Merciful? The disbelievers are not but in delusion". This is a question about Allah's might. Verse 21 says, "Or who is it that could provide for you if He withheld His provision? But they have persisted in insolence and aversion". This question is about provisions of food. Verse 22 says, "Then is one who walks fallen on his face better guided or one who walks erect on a straight path?". This is a question about two characters.

Verse 28 says, "Say, (O Muhammad), "Have you considered: whether Allah should cause my death and those with me or have mercy upon us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful punishment?". This is about divine justice. Verse 30 says, "Say, "Have you considered: if your water was to become sunken (into the earth), then who could bring you flowing water?". This question is about natural provision of water.

Asking questions encourages a person to think. It helps people identify their errors and helps in avoiding pitfalls. It challenges people to reason correctly, to grasp the truth.

2. Reflection

The chapter has three verses, which invite people to reflect. Allah says, "And already those before them had denied, and how (terrible) was My punishment" (Qur'an 67:18). After asking a few questions, the Qur'an is inviting people to reflect on possibility of punishment, in consequence of disbelief. Divine

punishment visited unbelievers before them. The Qur'an is referring to the communities of Aad, Thamood, Loot and Firon.

Allah says, "Say, "It is He who has produced you and made for you hearing and vision and hearts (i.e., intellect); little are you grateful" (Qur'an 67:23). After asking a few questions, the Qur'an is asking people to reflect on Allah's bounties. Allah has granted people the faculties of hearing, seeing and thinking so that man may appreciate truth. Using them with reason, man should be grateful to Allah. But many people remain inert. They do not appreciate the gift of Allah and do not use properly their powers to hear and see, to appreciate the truth.

Inviting people to reflect, Allah says in the Qur'an, "Say, "It is He who has multiplied you throughout the earth, and to Him you will be gathered"" (Qur'an 67:24). The Qur'an is asking people to reflect, that it is Allah alone who has settled human family on this earth. The purpose is to try them in the worldly life. Then on the Final Day of Judgement, He will assemble them all to take account of their deeds.

Significance of reflection is paramount. We know intuitively that we learn by experience and also that we learn from our mistakes. But research is increasingly telling us that effective learning, requires active thinking on our experiences. We need to question ourselves about what the experiences mean. The route from experience to understanding is through reflection.

Reflection provides deep learning, when one looks at situations through different lenses. By asking questions, one challenges the unstated assumptions about the world around us. One may overcome the tendency to focus merely on the negative. An exercise

in reflection and self-assessment provides an efficient way to think positively. Reflection serves as a powerful tool for developing our skills, inculcating confidence and providing motivation.

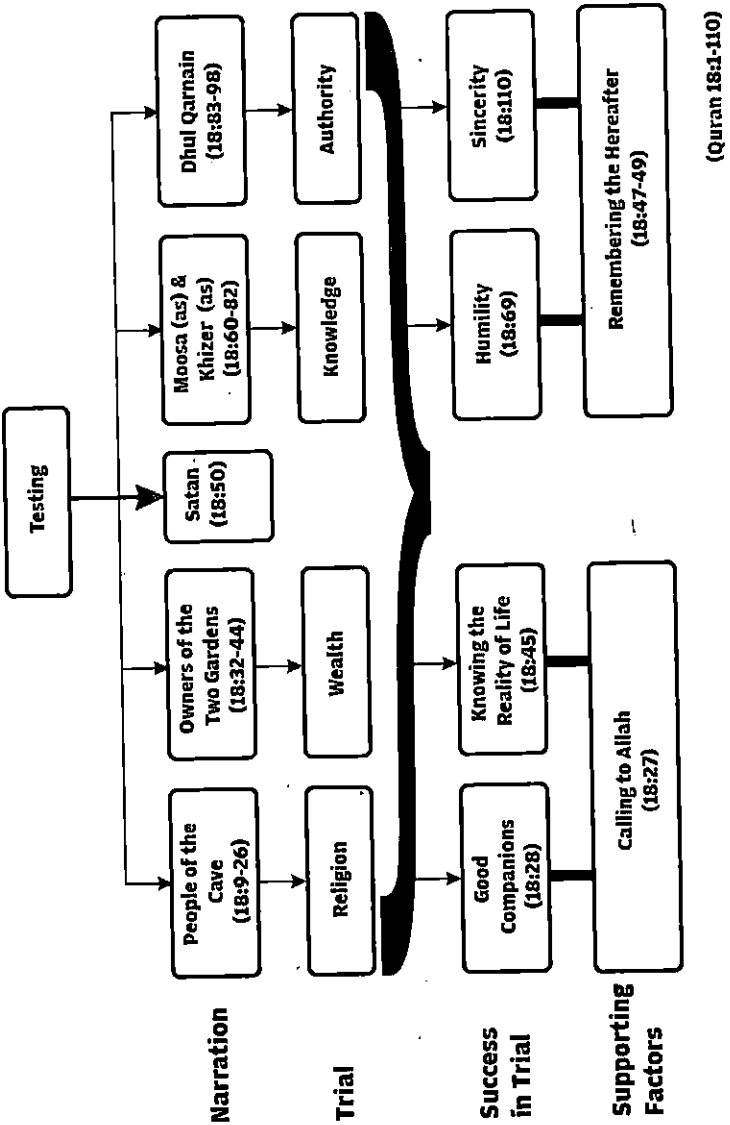
Conclusion

Questioning and reflection are two key methods of useful thinking, suggested by the Qur'an. The awakened intellect leads people to believe in one true God and the hereafter. When inviting people to Islam or encouraging them to think critically, the best method is the one used by the Qur'an. Surah Al-Mulk illustrates it. People might not accept Islam immediately. But if the systematic process of thinking is initiated, it might show good results at a later stage.

II

Tests and Trails

Four Facets of Testing



(Quran 18:1-110)

Introduction

Test is necessary feature of life, which everyone experiences; believers or non-believer. Man is not compelled to follow the route to Paradise or Hell. If man was not free to act, why would people be given guidance by Almighty? Those who think that Allah has not given us freedom of action; are mistaken. If we were not free, one could not justify the concept of 'test' mentioned in numerous verses of the Qur'an. Nor would the Day of Judgement, have any significance. However, a question arises; we believe that Allah knows everything, then why should He test us?

The test which we are to undergo is not meant to add to the knowledge of Allah. Allah knows everything; still it is necessary that all men and women be given an actual opportunity to exercise their freedom. Allah's justice and mercy will be manifest on the Day of Judgement. Allah does not choose for human beings, the destiny of Paradise or Hell; merely on the basis of His own knowledge. Rather, He puts them to test, in relation to their beliefs and deeds. In the absence of freedom, those sent to Hell could rightly complain that they were being punished, without any lapse on their part. Why should others enjoy bliss of Paradise without any good deed to their credit? So, in order to ensure justice and fairness, it was necessary that all persons be given freedom and put to test.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tested? But We have certainly tested those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars" (Qur'an 29:2-3). The verse clearly states that everyone

who is a believer, will be tested and Allah has also tested the people before us.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "(He) who created death and life to test you (as to) which of you is best in deed and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving" (Qur'an 67:2). From this verse, we learn that Allah has created man, with an objective to test human beings; to see which of them is best in deeds. Allah also says, "Do they not see that they are tested every year once or twice but then they do not repent nor do they remember?" (Qur'an 9:126). From this verse, we learn that man should be ready to face the test, as it may come in any form; then he should learn from it.

Chapter Kahaf of the Qur'an sheds light on this theme. Its recitation and understanding can help people extract valuable lessons that may help in shaping one's character, to lead one to the path of righteousness. It contains numerous lessons for mankind. Chapter Kahaf includes four important events from the past, which teach us wisdom. These lessons are available for mankind to understand, remember and benefit from.

1. Trial of Faith

Narration: The narration is about the men of cave. They were believers and lived in a locality of non-believers. When they noticed threat to their lives because of faith, they left the city and went to a cave to seek protection of Allah and retain their faith. There, Allah bestowed sleep over them. When they woke up after many years, people of their city had embraced Islam. Thus, this story shows that Allah rescued the believers from difficulties.

Trial: Allah puts the faith of a person to trial. When Allah puts the faith to trial and when a believer

is steadfast in his or her faith, then Allah assists them in ways that are beyond comprehension.

Success in Trial: The story gives a lesson that; people must seek companions who are good and righteous. The men of cavè were all righteous, thus, their being together was a mercy of Allah. A Muslim should be steadfast in his or her faith and remain in the company of good people, as it is mentioned in the Qur'an, "And keep yourself patient (by being) with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one, whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever (in) neglect" (Qur'an 18:28).

2. Trial of Wealth

Narration: The story is about a person who was the owner of two gardens and was wealthy and rich in every regard. However, his wealth led him astray and he started doubting his faith, as a result of which Allah deprived him of all the worldly artifice and bounties. This made him realize the transient nature of resources of this world. But by then, it was too late for him.

Trial: Wealth is a test from Allah. Therefore, by giving wealth, He is actually testing the wealthy whether they are grateful to Him or not.

Success in Trial: People must learn that bounties of this world are all temporary. Therefore, when they are available, one must thank Allah and spend on the needy. In the Qur'an, Allah says, "And present to them the example of the life of this world, (its being) like rain which We send down from the sky, and the

vegetation of the earth mingles with it and [then] it becomes dry remnants, scattered by the winds. And Allah is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability" (Qur'an 18:45).

3. Trial of Knowledge

Narration: The story talks about Prophet Musa (pbuh) and Khizer. Allah sent Musa (pbuh) to meet Khizer, who in this story demonstrated that he (Khizer) had more knowledge than Prophet Musa, in some matters.

Trial: The knowledge given to an individual (from Allah) it to test the individual. When knowledge is given to someone, he should be properly grateful.

Success in Trial: Possessing knowledge of things should teach humility to a person. One should realise that there is always someone else who is superior him in knowledge. He may have a better understanding of reality than one does.

4. Trial of Authority

Narration: Allah mentions the story of a great king Dhul-Qarnayn who travelled across the world. He helped people in need and spread good wherever he went. He provided relief to people from the menace of Gag and Magog.

Trial: When Allah gives certain authority to someone, it is to test them on how they use the authority.

Success in Trial: The lesson to be learnt from this story is that power is a gift from Allah. When He gives power; He tests people. Those who have power should use it to do good and make lives of others easier and fight evil.

Factors Leading to Success in Trials

To be successful, one should keep good company. Also a believer ought to call people towards Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an, "And recite, (O Muhammad), what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. There is no changer of His words, and never will you find in other than Him, a refuge" (Qur'an 18:27).

To achieve humility and sincerity, one needs to remember the hereafter. Allah says, "And (warn of) the Day when We will remove the mountains and you will see the earth prominent, and We will gather them and not leave behind, from them, anyone. And they will be presented before your Lord in rows, (and He will say), "You have certainly come to Us, just as We created you the first time. But you claimed that We would never make for you an appointment". And the record [of deeds] will be placed (open), and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say, "Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?" And they will find what they did, present (before them). And your Lord does injustice to no one" (Qur'an 18:47-49).

Conclusion

The Qur'an speaks about trials. It indicates important steps to be followed to succeed, when tested. Noble character is to be inculcated in order to succeed. In Surah Kahaf, verse fifty talks about Satan. From this we learn that Satan plays a role to deviate people from the straight path. Then they will not succeed in the test ordained by Allah. One must guard against Satan, to achieve success.

Multiple Filters

(Quran 2:246-249)

Introduction

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Verily, We created man from a drop of mingled sperm so that We may test him; and therefore, We made him hearing and seeing. We have indeed showed him the way, now he be grateful or ungrateful" (Qur'an 76:3). From this verse, we learn that man was created to be tested. So, he was given the ability to hear and see. Thus, Allah is going to test us, throughout our lives in various forms.

There was an incident which occurred during the time of Prophet Dawood (pbuh). The Children of Israel were put to test. The test was about seriousness, commitment, discipline and sacrifice. This is a series of tests to identify the best.

1. Seriousness Test

The first test conducted, was one of seriousness. Allah says in the Qur'an, "Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Musa when they said to a prophet of theirs, "Appoint for us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah". He said, 'Would you perhaps refrain from fighting, if fighting was prescribed for you?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the cause of Allah, when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?" But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers" (Qur'an 2:246).

From this verse, we learn that the Children of Israel asked for a king to be appointed, so that they might fight, under his leadership. But when they were actually asked to go and fight, most of them refused to do so. The people who were not ready to go to the

battle failed to clear the 'test of seriousness'. But some of them went forward. According to the commentary given by Ibn Kathir the strength of the community of Bani Israel was approximately 8, 00, 000 at that time.

2. Commitment Test

The second test which was conducted in this event, was of commitment. Allah says in the Qur'an, "And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allah has appointed for you, Talut as a king". They said, "How can he have kingship over us, while we are worthier of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?" He (the prophet) said, "Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives power to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing (in favour) and Knowing" (Qur'an 2:247).

From this verse, we learn that Allah appointed Taloot as the king for the Children of Israel, to fight the enemies. But many people refused to accept Taloot as their leader. The people who did not accept him as leader, failed in the 'test of commitment'. But others went ahead to take part in the battle, under Taloot's command. According to the commentary given by Ibn Kathir, there were approximately 80,000 such persons who constituted the army.

3. Discipline Test

The third test which was conducted was of discipline. Allah says, "And when Taloot went forth with the soldiers, he said, "Indeed, Allah will be testing you with a river. So, whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is indeed of

me, excepting one who takes (from it) in the hollow of his hand". But they drank from it, except a (very) few of them..." (Qur'an 2:249).

From this verse, we learn that the army of Children of Israel was tested, as Taloot asked the soldiers not to drink water from the river, except a handful. Most of the soldiers were not able to resist thirst. They did not control desire and they filled their stomachs with water. The soldiers who drank more than a handful amount of water, failed in the 'test of discipline'. But others went ahead to the battle field. According to the commentary given by Ibn Kathir, there were only 4,000 disciplined people who went to the battlefield.

4. Sacrifice Test

The fourth test conducted, was of sacrifice. Allah says, "... Then when he had crossed it along with those who believed with him, they said, "There is no power for us today against Jalut and his soldiers". But those who were certain that they would meet Allah said, "How often a small group has overcome a larger one, by permission of Allah. And Allah is with the patient"" (Qur'an 2:249).

From this verse, we learn that when the soldiers actually went to the battle field, they had to face their enemies. Time had come to actively take part in the battle. When they saw that the army of Jalut was huge, many soldiers backed out at the last moment. They said that they had no power to fight Jalut and his soldiers that day. The soldiers who did not take part in the battle failed the 'test of sacrifice'. The soldiers who marched ahead to join the battle, cleared all the four tests. It has been narrated by Al-Bara that, "The

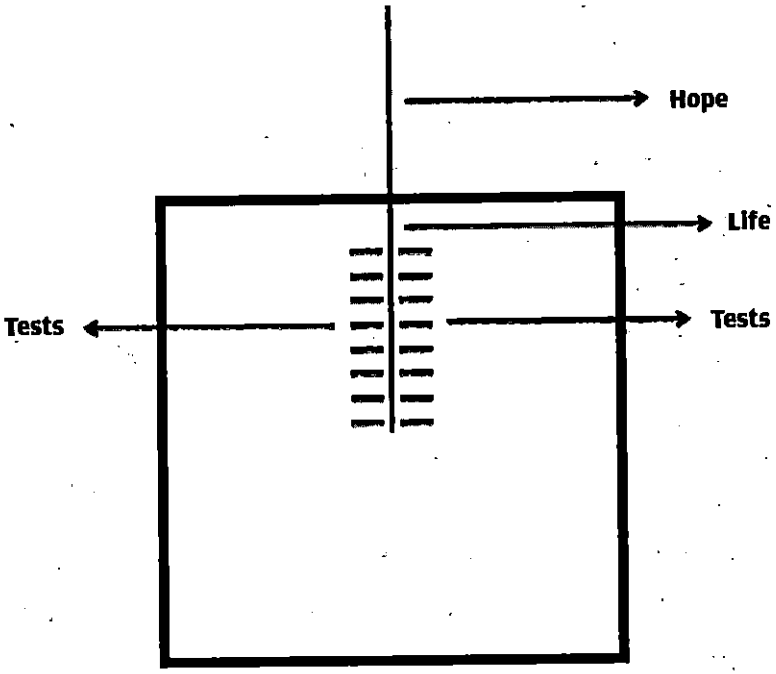
companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who took part in the battle of Badar, told me that there were over three hundred and ten men who crossed the river (of Jordon) with Taloot. By Allah, none crossed the river with him but a believer" (Bukhari). From this we can learn that there were approximately only 310 members who took part in the battle.

Conclusion

These verses were revealed before the battle of Badar, in order to motivate the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) and to give them courage to go ahead and fight in the cause of Allah. The example of Taloot and his army was cited in this regard. They were also very few in number but still Allah gave them victory over Jalut. Thousands of Children of Israel claimed to be willing to fight for their lost glory. But after various tests, only 310 soldiers lived upto their claim. In this instance, in the total population, the best people were only four in every ten thousand.

The criteria of these tests can also be adopted today, when people are to be appointed for specific tasks. If the task has to be accomplished effectively and efficiently, it should be ensured that people appointed are serious, committed and disciplined and are willing to face hardships, if need be.

Trials and Journey of Life



Introduction

Islam informs us that tests are part and parcel of everyone's life. Whether a person is young or old, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, he will be tested. Allah says in the Qur'an, "(He) who created death and life to test you (as to) which of you is best in deed and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving" (Qur'an 67:2). Thus, we learn from the verse that Allah has given us life so that He can test us, as to which of us are best in deeds.

Abdullah ibn Masud said, "The Prophet (pbuh) drew a square on sand. He then drew a line in the centre of the square, coming out of the square from the top. He then drew small lines, on either side of the central line". He then said, "This is man. This is his lifespan which encompasses him. This line which is coming out of the square symbolises his hopes. These small lines are the hardships, difficulties and calamities that will afflict him. If one of them misses him, the next one will get him. If the next one misses him, the following one will get him. If all of them miss him, old-age and senility will afflict him" (Bukhari). The hadith can be understood as describing the whole journey of human life.

The hadith is understood in the context of a verse of Qur'an. "Do they not see that they are tried every year, once or twice but then they do not repent nor do they remember?" (Qur'an 9:126). From this, we understand that it is in the plan of Allah that people be tested regularly. As man attains the age of maturity, Allah starts testing him in various situations and circumstances. Tests continues till death.

Forms of Tests

The following are the various forms of tests:

1. Through People

Other people often cause suffering to a person. A tyrant ruler, an irritating neighbour, a disobedient child, a heartless enemy, an undisciplined subordinate, a boasting superior, a dishonest customer, a cheating partner, indifferent parents, a torturing spouse, an unjust arbitrator, are a few examples. A man is tested in all these cases, willingly or unwillingly. Allah says,

"Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward" (Qur'an 64:15).

2. Through Nature

Allah tests people through nature. Such sufferings are described by us as 'act of God', such as, earthquake, cyclone, storms and such other natural incidents beyond human control. Such incidents are part of destiny designed and planned by Allah. Nevertheless, the sufferer (man) is put to test by these calamities.

3. Through Losses and Injury

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And We will surely test you, with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and fruits but give good tidings to the patient" (Qur'an 2:155). From this, we learn that Allah will test people by hardships. They might suffer losses in their livelihood or lose their wealth. One might lose a family member. Desired results of one's efforts may not be achieved.

4. Through a Person's own Carelessness

It happens that a person overlooks the rules of hygiene and falls ill. He himself becomes the immediate cause of his suffering, and his affliction is the natural consequence of his carelessness. It is a self-inflicted harm and nobody else is to be blamed for it.

Hope

Every individual would always want to lead smooth life, without difficulties. He would desire peace without any tension or worries. Everyone has

positive hopes about fruitful role in society. Parents hope that children will take care of them in old age. A farmer hopes to get a good yield every year. A patient takes medicine hoping that his illness will be cured. A new couple hopes that their marriage will bring them happiness and peace and prosperity to their family. Similarly, everyone entertains hopes and expects good future.

Man makes plans but Allah has His own scheme for this world. Allah's plan is invariably good for this world. Allah says in the Qur'an, "... But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you and Allah Knows, while you know not" (Qur'an 2:216). Thus, Allah's plan to test a person, is for his own good. But the person would not realise it, most of the time.

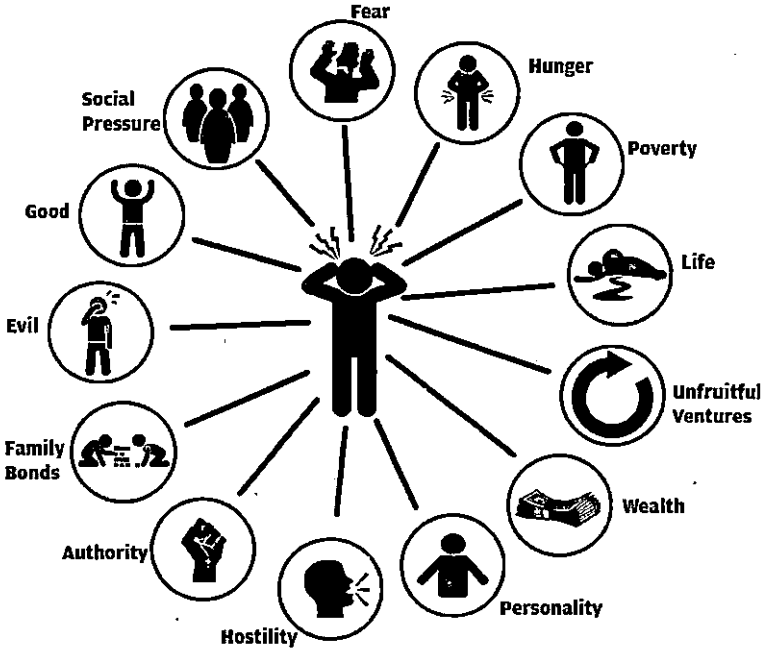
Conclusion

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tested?" (Qur'an 29:2). As soon as an individual says that he believes in Allah, his belief will be tested. Paradise is Allah's reward; so, test is necessary to identify those chosen to enter paradise. Believers might have to undergo tests, suffer losses of life and property and face dangers, misfortunes and difficulties. In the cause of Allah, it might be necessary to sacrifice everything dear to one.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such (trial) has not yet come to you, as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until (even their) messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of

Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near" (Qur'an 2:214). The theme is also mentioned in Qur'an in 2:142, 2:179, 9:16 and 47:31. Allah in these verses has impressed on the Muslims that testing is the touchstone by which the pure and the impure are judged. The impure are turned aside by Allah and the pure are selected so that Allah may honour them with His favours, which only the sincere believers deserve.

Varieties of Trials



Introduction

Human life is full of tests as the purpose of creation of man is to test him. Allah says in the Qur'an, "And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His Throne had been upon water, that He might test you as to which of you is best in deed" (Qur'an 11:7). The verse makes it clear that the world was created to test people. Allah says, "Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth, adornment for it, that We may test them (as to) which of them is best in deed" (Qur'an 18:7).

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried?" (Qur'an 29:2). The verse states that Allah will test those who claim to be believers. In a number of ways, people are tested throughout their lives. The following are some of them:

Fear, Hunger, Loss of Wealth, Lives and Crop Yield

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits but give good tidings to the patient" (Qur'an 2:155). The above aspects are elaborated below:

1. Fear

Fear refers to an unpleasant apprehension caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm. Allah would test people by circumstances which create fear. Fear of aggression, loss, poverty, unemployment, or pain may oppress one. Man is tested through his response to these fears.

2. Hunger

Hunger is due to poverty. A person may become so poor that he can't get food, which is basic necessity. When a person is afflicted with poverty, he is tempted to adopt wrong means to satisfy his needs. The test is about people's integrity in adverse circumstances.

3. Poverty

Wealth is attractive. People love it as it gives them popularity, comfort and stress-free life. Sometimes people are tested, when wealth is taken away from

them. A man can lose his wealth in a natural calamity, an accident, in business failure or during illness. Allah would test a person in the event of financial loss. The individual's response to such setback, would be judged.

4. Life

Man is emotionally attached with many people, especially his family members. Allah would test them by taking away their lives, especially when it is an unexpected death. Children die in front of their parents, parents die a sudden death before reaching old age, close relatives die in accidents, etc. These events might act as shock to many and Allah would judge how people respond to shocking situations.

5. Unfruitful Ventures

A person expects return from hard work which he has put in any activity. The farmer might work hard and expect a good crop. But the return may not be as per his expectations. The expected return could be crop yield, profit in business, wages or an educational degree. The test determines whether a person is content, with what he has received, in the given circumstances.

6. Wealth

Allah says in the Qur'an, "You will surely be tested in your wealth and in yourselves. And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah, much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah - indeed, that is praiseworthy" (Qur'an 3:186). These aspects are elaborated below:

Wealth refers to possession of resources and goods. Sometimes, Allah tests people by giving them plenty of wealth. People think that wealth is given to them because Allah is pleased with them. But actually, it is a test for the person. Being rich may be a greater test than poverty. When a person has wealth, there are more chances of indulging in evil.

7. Personality

Personal traits include faith, capabilities, talents, knowledge and skills. They are tested in position of authority. Everything that happens to us impacts our personality and is a means of testing us. Thus, Allah would test man through capabilities given to him. Allah says, "... Had Allah willed, He would have made you one community, but (He intended) to test you in what He has given you ...".

8. Hostility

Qur'an informs us that the people to whom the scripture was given and those who associate others with Allah, are the ones who are going to abuse the believers. This behaviour is nothing but a test for the believers. Believers will be judged in their response to such abuses from the disbelievers.

9. Authority

Allah says in the Qur'an, "... And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees (of rank) that He may try you through what He has given you ..." (Qur'an 6:165). First, all human beings as such are vicegerents of Allah on earth, so Allah has entrusted them with many things and endowed them with power to use them. Second, it

is Allah's plan that there are differences of rank among His vicegerents. The trust placed in some is greater than that in others. Some men have been granted control of more resources than others. Some are more gifted in respect of their abilities. Likewise, some human beings have been placed under the trust of others. Thus, Allah gives power and position to people to test them. They are judged in relation to the extent they do justice, by proper use of the authority given to them. The position might be in the context of family, society or organisation.

10. Family Bonds

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And know that your wealth and your children are but a trial and that Allah has with Him, a great reward" (Qur'an 8:28). The verse states that children would be a source of trial for people. (Wealth has been discussed above). People are naturally attached to their children; they would be ready to do anything for them. The excessive love which they have towards their children, might lead them to commit wrong. They would like to please their children, in any case and keep them happy. Thus Allah points out that, inspite of love, man should control himself and abide by ethical limits.

11. Evil

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Every soul will taste death. And We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned" (Qur'an 21:35).

Adversity may visit people. In adversity, their conduct is judged whether they remain within the prescribed ethical limits and keep on striving or become low-spirited, depressed and turn to evil. One

may encounter unpleasant circumstances such as illness, grief and pain. A sensible person would not be deluded by adversity. He regards it as test and tries to pass through it gracefully.

12. Good

Allah puts man to test through adversity. But people are also tested when good things are given to them in plenty, such as, health, happiness, comfort and riches. This is to judge whether prosperity makes them proud, cruel and lax or they become grateful to Allah. It is more difficult to be steadfast and consistent when one is blessed with good things. Thus, one needs to exercise greater caution when tested in this way.

13. Social Pressure

Allah says in the Qur'an, "...And We have made some of you (people) as trial for others, will you have patience? And ever is your Lord, Seeing" (Qur'an 25:20). The verse states that some people are a test for others. There are people of various dispositions; whose conduct is a test for others. Parents are a source of test for children and vice versa. Husband's conduct could become a test for the wife or vice versa. Disbelievers' activities constitute a test for believers. Colleagues are a test to one another, so are neighbours. Thus, one should be aware of the real nature of social interactions; which test them in various ways.

Conclusion

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such (trial) has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and

were shaken until (even their) messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near" (Qur'an 2:214). The verse makes it clear that before rewarding them with Paradise, Allah will test them in above-mentioned ways. Their conduct in trials would identify the successful and the losers.

Prophet Yusuf's Experience

Introduction

Human beings are created to be tested to identify those best in deeds. Test is to be faced by everyone in one's life. Test presupposes human freedom. His choice leads a man to Paradise or Hell. The way he faces the test will determine his fate. The Qur'an mentions experiences of Prophets so that people might derive lessons from their lives. Allah judged them through various tests. They serve as examples so that

people would learn proper response when Allah would test them similarly. The experience of Prophet Yusuf (pbuh) is noteworthy.

Tests

Events in the life of Prophet Yusuf (pbuh) are described in chapter 12 of the Qur'an:

1. Test of Patience

i. Allah says, "He (Yaqoob) said, "O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers or they will contrive against you a plan. Indeed Satan, to man, is a manifest enemy"" (Qur'an 12:5). When Yusuf saw a dream, he was advised by his father not to reveal the dream to his brothers. Yusuf was patient enough to keep the dream a secret. Generally, people are very enthusiastic to share their dreams with others but Yusuf did not do so. Thus, Prophet Yusuf patiently waited for the dream to become a reality.

ii. Allah says, "Said a speaker among Yusuf's brethren, "Do not kill Yusuf but throw him into the bottom of a well; some travellers will pick him up, if you mean to do (something)" (Qur'an 12:10). When Yusuf was put into the well, he remained patient. He was left alone in the well but he did not panic.

iii. Allah says further, "And there came a company of travellers; then they sent their water drawer, and he let down his bucket. He said, "Good news! Here is a boy". And they concealed him, (taking him) as merchandise; and Allah was Knowing of what they did. And they sold him for a reduced price, a few dirhams and concerning him, they

were content with little" (Qur'an 12:19-20). When Yusuf was being sold, he did not panic, about who would buy him and where he would land up. Thus, Prophet Yusuf was patient in this situation as well.

iv. Allah says in the Qur'an, "And he (Yusuf) said to the one, whom he knew would go free, "Mention me before your master". But Satan made him forget the mention (to) his master, and he (i.e., Yusuf) remained in prison for several years" (Qur'an 12:42). When Prophet Yusuf was in prison, he asked one of his mates to inform his master (about him) but he forgot to do so. Hence, Prophet Yusuf had to stay in the prison for several years. Thus, Yusuf remained patient during his entire stay in prison.

2. Test of Knowledge

i. Qur'an records, "And thus will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (i.e., events and dreams) and complete His favour upon you and upon the family of Yaqub, as He completed it upon your fathers before, Ibrahim and Ishaq. Indeed, your Lord is Knowing and Wise" (Qur'an 12:6). Yusuf was given the knowledge and skill of interpreting events and dreams. When Yusuf was in prison and two prisoners asked for the interpretation of their dreams, he interpreted their dreams. Thus, Prophet Yusuf used the knowledge to help people.

ii. Allah says, "And when he (i.e., Yusuf) reached maturity, We gave him judgement and knowledge. And thus, We reward the doers of good" (Qur'an 12:22). When Yusuf grew up Allah gave him the ability to judge and provided him with the

necessary knowledge. When he was made in-charge of the state resources to manage the crisis, he used his knowledge constructively. Thus, Prophet Yusuf used the knowledge in the right way and never misused it.

3. Test of Comfort

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife, "Make his residence comfortable. Perhaps he will benefit us, or we will adopt him as a son". And thus, We established Yusuf in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events. And Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know" (Qur'an 12:21). The Azeez of Egypt got Yusuf to his palace, gave him a comfortable place to stay and went on to adopt him as his son. Yusuf did not change when he began to stay in comfort. Prophet Yusuf remained a pious person, even when all sorts of comforts and luxuries were available.

4. Test of Temptation

Allah says, "And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him. She closed the doors and said, "Come". He said, "(I seek) the refuge of Allah. Indeed, He is my Master, who has made good my residence. Indeed, wrongdoers will not succeed" (Qur'an 12:23). As Yusuf was physically very attractive, the wife of Azeez tried to tempt him and invited him for a wrong act, but he abstained from it by remembering Allah. Thus, Prophet Yusuf controlled his sexual desires and abstained from the grave sin.

5. Test of Modesty

Allah says in the Qur'an, "So when she heard of their scheming, she sent for them and prepared for them a banquet and gave each one of them a knife and said (to Yusuf), "Come out before them". And when they saw him, they greatly admired him and cut their hands and said, "Perfect is Allah! This is not a man; this is none but a noble angel" (Qur'an 12:31). Allah had made Yusuf very handsome and attractive. But he was never arrogant or boastful about his beauty. Thus, Prophet Yusuf remained modest.

6. Test of Adversity

Allah says, "Then it appeared to them after they had seen the signs that Yusuf be imprisoned him for a time" (Qur'an 12:35). Yusuf was innocent but still he was put into prison, as if he was the culprit. Yusuf faced this injustice and continued to be patient.

7. Test of Opportunity

Qur'an reports that Yusuf said, "... Indeed, I have left the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and they, in the Hereafter, are disbelievers. And I have followed the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaqub. And it was not for us to associate anything with Allah. That is from the favour of Allah upon us and upon the people, but most of the people are not grateful. O (my) two companions of prison, are separate lords better or Allah, the One, the Prevailing? You worship not besides Him except (mere) names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. Authority of legislation is not for anyone but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none except Him. That

is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know" (Qur'an 12:37-40).

When Yusuf was in prison, he got an opportunity to speak to people. He used this opportunity to introduce them to the right path. He advised them not to associate partners with Allah but worship the one true Lord. He invited them to follow Islam as it is the only true religion. Thus, Yusuf made effective use of the opportunity. He invited people to Islam, even when he was not in comfortable circumstances.

8. Test of Authority

. Qur'an says, "(Yusuf) said, "Appoint me over the resources of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian". And thus, We established Yusuf in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We touch with Our mercy whom We will, and We do not withhold who do good" (Qur'an 12:55-56). When Yusuf was given the authority to handle the issues of the state and to save the people from the crisis, he made the right use of his authority. He worked with complete honesty and did justice to responsibility entrusted to him. Prophet Yusuf did not misuse the power given to him.

9. Test of Judgement

Allah says, "So when they entered upon him (i.e., Yusuf), they said, "O Azeez, adversity has touched us and our family, and we have come with goods poor in quality, but give us full measure and be charitable to us. Indeed, Allah rewards the charitable"" (Qur'an 12:88). Qur'an later reports, "He said, "No blame will there be upon you today. Allah will forgive you; and He is the most merciful" (Qur'an 12:92). When his

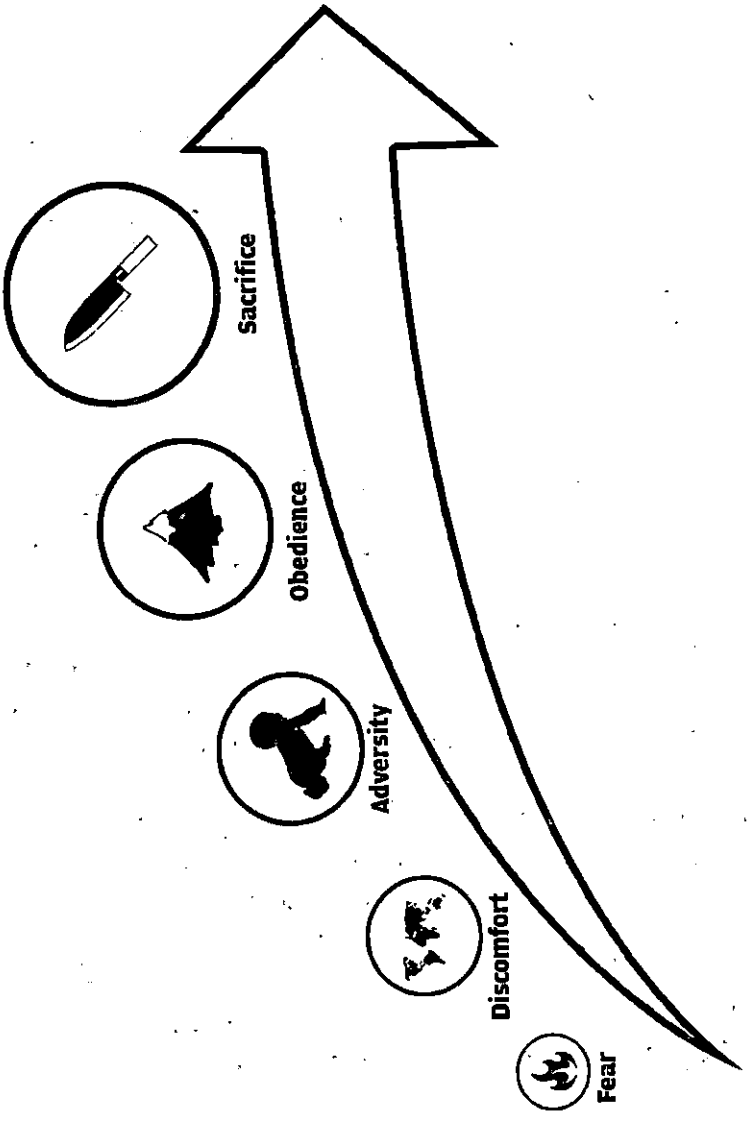
brothers came to him to seek help, Yusuf forgave them and provided them with what they wanted.

He was in a position to take revenge, but he refrained. Brothers had been jealous of him and they had put him in a well, but he forgave them. Thus, Prophet Yusuf took the right decision by forgiving all his brothers and providing them with what they needed.

Conclusion

Prophet Yusuf went through comprehensive tests. In all the tests, he was successful. He responded in the best possible manner. Generally, people would also face different kinds of tests in their lives. The life of Yusuf is a model, presenting proper response if one encounters similar situations. The Qur'an makes people aware of possible trials. It teaches them to react, properly in order to be successful.

Prophet Ibrahim's Experience



Introduction

Ibrahim is well known among messengers of Allah. He is such an important personality that the festival of Eid-ul-Azha is celebrated across the world in order to imitate his act of sacrifice. Ibrahim went through a lot of tests after attaining Prophet-hood. He was successful in all the tests. Through this we learn that Prophets, who are chosen to convey the message of Allah, are tested to a greater degree than normal people. The various forms of tests which Ibrahim went through, teach people the proper response to tests.

1. Fear

When Ibrahim broke the idols, the idol worshippers decided to burn him. Anger was aflame in their hearts. They decided to throw Ibrahim into the biggest fire they could build. Everyone was asked to gather wood to ignite the fire. They dug a deep pit, filled it with firewood and ignited it. They cast Ibrahim into the fire. The fire was ready with rising flames. People stood away to watch.

Ibrahim was cast into the fire. But his descent into the blaze was like descent in a cool garden. The flames did not burn him. Allah had issued His command. "We (i.e., Allah) said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Ibrahim"" (Qur'an 21:69). The fire submitted to the command of Allah, becoming cool and safe for Ibrahim. He was safe in the midst of the fire as if sitting in a garden. When all this happened, Ibrahim did not show fear. He had strong faith in Allah, that Allah was with him and he would be saved if Allah so willed. The first test was thus completed.

2. Discomfort

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And Lut believed him. (Ibrahim) said, "Indeed, I will emigrate to (the service of) my Lord. Indeed, He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise" (Qur'an 29:26).

Travel involves a lot of discomfort and Prophet Ibrahim did not stay in one place, for long. He did a lot of travelling along with his wife Sarah and his nephew Lut (who later became a prophet). He left his father and his native place Ur (Iraq) and went to the village Kaldaniyeen, on the western bank of the Euphrates River and lived there for a while. Later he left for Harraan, and from there he migrated to Canaan (Syria), where he continued his propagation of the message of Allah. In this way, he continued his journey and reached Palestine. Then he continued to move westwards until he reached Egypt. Later he went to Makkah. Thus, Prophet Ibrahim continued to travel to spread the truth and did not show any laxity.

3. Adversity

Ibrahim was without children for a very long period. Allah says in the Qur'an, "And (then) he said, "Indeed, I will go to (where I am ordered by) my Lord; He will guide me. My Lord, grant me (a child) from among the righteous". So, We gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy" (Qur'an 37:99-101). Allah also says, "(Ibrahim said) Praise to Allah, who has granted to me in old age Ishmael and Ishaq. Indeed, my Lord is the Hearer of supplication" (Qur'an 14:39).

Prophet Ibrahim did not have children for a very long time. But he did not show any disappointment; continued to be patient and prayed to Allah for a child.

4. Obedience

The Qur'an quotes, "(Ibrahim said) Our Lord, I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So, make hearts among people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits, that they might be grateful" (Qur'an 14:37).

One day, Ibrahim asked his wife Hajar to get her son and prepare for a long journey. In a few days Ibrahim started on the journey with his wife Hajar and their son Ishmael. The child was still nursing. Ibrahim walked through cultivated land, desert, and mountains till he reached the desert of the Arabian Peninsula. He came to an uncultivated valley having no fruit, trees, food or water. The valley had no signs of life. Ibrahim left his wife and child in the valley, with food and water hardly enough for two days. He turned around and began to walk away. His wife hurried to him, "Where are you going Ibrahim, leaving us in this barren valley?"

Soon, she understood that Ibrahim was not acting on his own initiative. She realized that Allah had commanded him to do so. She asked him, "Did Allah command you to do so?" He replied, "Yes". Then this great lady said, "We are not going to be lost, since Allah who has commanded you, is with us". Thus, when Ibrahim was asked to leave his wife and small child in a barren place, he did so, as it was a command from Allah; Ibrahim was successful in the test of obedience.

5. Sacrifice

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And when he (Ibrahim's son) reached with him (the age of) exertion,

he (Ibrahim) said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I (must) sacrifice you, so see what you think". He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast". And when they had both submitted (to Allah) and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, "O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision". Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was a clear trial" (Qur'an 37:102-106).

When Ismail grew up, Ibrahim saw a dream that he was sacrificing his son. Ibrahim understood that it was not a mere dream but a command from Allah. Now the real test was, will Ibrahim sacrifice his son, who was given to him after a very long time, after a lot of supplications. Prophet Ibrahim went ahead to speak to his son, took his consent and took him along to scarify him. Through this act, he showed his obedience to Allah. He was ready to scarify even the most loved thing, in the way of his Lord. The final test was to scarify his son, in the way of Allah. It was a severe test for a father. Ibrahim emerged successful in this trial.

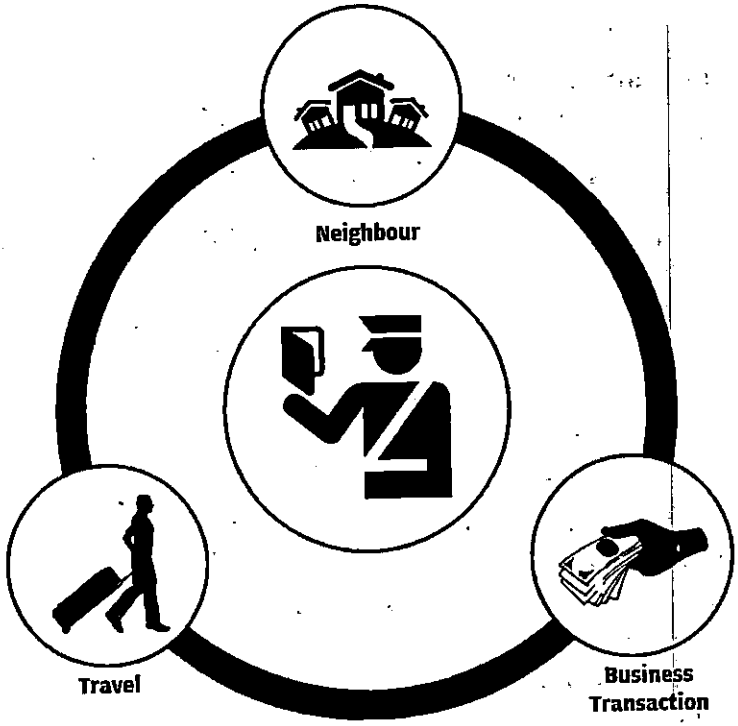
Conclusion

Allah says in the Qur'an, "And (mention, O Muhammad), when Ibrahim was tried by his Lord with (a number of) commands and he fulfilled them. (Allah) said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people". (Ibrahim) said, "And what about my descendants?" (Allah) said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers" (Qur'an 2:124). Allah says that Prophet Ibrahim was tested, he succeeded in them and he was appointed as the leader for the people.

Prophet Ibrahim went through five major tests; he was tested with fear, discomfort, and adversity. His

obedience to Allah and will to scarify were put on trial. Ibrahim was successful in all these tests. He set high standards for all times to come. Man should not be depressed by problems, big or small. One should always remember that test is part of Allah's plan. Soon problems will disappear; adversity will be followed by ease, just as in the case of Prophet Ibrahim.

Umar's Criteria of Evaluating People



Introduction

Before entrusting someone with responsibility or beginning a partnership, it is advisable to know that person. It would be difficult to know about a person, one meets for the first time. It is also easy to fake good qualities and attractive etiquette when the meeting is short. The true character of an individual would only emerge in difficult situations. One of the sayings of

Caliph Umar would help us understand as to how people could be tested. Once Umar asked about a man who had given testimony, wanting to find out whether anyone could vouch for him. A man said to him, "I will vouch for him, O Ameer Al-Momineen, Umar asked, "Are you his neighbour?". He said, "No". He then asked, "Did you do any business transaction with him?". He said, "No". He asked next, "Did you travel with him?". He said, "No". Umar said, "Perhaps you saw him in the mosque, standing, sitting and praying?' He said, "Yes'. Umar said, "Go away, for you do not know him".

The following are the various contexts of testing the character of a person:

1. Neighbour

Neighbour refers to a person or family who is living next door to one or very close to one's house. After the family members, the next category of people who would know a person well, are the neighbours. They see the person almost every day. They would be aware of his activities. A person who fails to be a good neighbour, would fail to be a good human being. If he does not care for people next to him, how would he care for others.

A neighbour would come to know about one's relationship with parents, siblings and children. He would know the type of friends one has. He would be aware of his habits, topics of interest, disposition, behaviour and attitude. When one is seeking an alliance for one's son, daughter, brother, or sister; neighbours would be the best people to seek advice from.

2. Business Transaction

Business transaction refers to any business activity and may involve buying and selling. A person might be greedy or materialistic, wanting to become rich quickly. Such a man would do wrong and unethical acts to get money. An honest person, who controls his desires and chooses to be on the right path, can be considered a person of great character. Assessing people based on business transactions, would be a reliable method to gauge integrity and honesty of a person.

Interaction with a person in business transaction, would reveal how honest he is. One would know whether he lies or speaks the truth; how he treats his employees and subordinates. Does he pay wages on time, does he return an investment or loan honestly. Does he get angry soon; do his actions match his words; how does he treat people when they make mistakes. Before giving credit to someone or initiating a business transaction, it would be better to seek the opinion of those who already have some experience of business activity with him.

3. Travel

Travelling involves going from one place to another. Travel is not easy. One leaves one's comfort zone when travelling. Even today when travelling it relatively comfortable, it still remains a tedious task. When one gets out of comfort zone, his real personality would emerge.

When a person has done some travelling with another, he would know about his companion. Is he careful or a spendthrift; does he get angry easily? Is he grateful to people? How does he spend his money and

time? Which topics interest him? Is he consistent in his behaviour? How does he treat people who make mistakes? What are his bad habits? When a person is being appointed to a particular position, it is important to know his character. One of the best ways to know a person's character is to travel with him.

Conclusion

It is very important to test a person before initiating a transaction or entrusting him with some responsibility. It would be better to test the person, so that we would not regret our decision at a later stage. Sometimes reversing the decision would not be possible. It would be difficult to cancel a contract once we enter into it. The quote of Umar gives us a method which could be adopted to test the character of a person. One needs to locate someone who is a neighbour or has done business transaction with the person or travelled with him. His opinion should be taken into consideration before taking a decision.